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ABSTRACT

This report contains the observations made by a trio of external evaluators who conducted an on-site evaluation of the Columbus Teacher Center. A wide range of educational evaluation areas were explored. The report represents a description of current practices, strengths, concerns, and recommendations as viewed by the evaluation team. Educational policy, management and staffing concerns, needs assessment procedures, program development procedures, the facility itself, fiscal procedures, means of research dissemination, and impact of the teacher center project to date are dealt with in the report. (Author/LH)

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A DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES

OF

THE BARTHOLOMEW CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL CORPORATION

COLUMBUS TEACHER CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

This report contains the observations made by a trio of external evaluators who conducted an on-site evaluation of the Columbus Teacher Center, Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation, Columbus, Indiana beginning on Monday, May 5 and ending on Wednesday, May 7, 1980. The evaluation team was composed of educators representing wide and varied backgrounds in Teacher Centering: Ms. Pat Geedy, classroom teacher and former co-director of the Elkhart Teacher Center in Elkhart, Indiana; Dr. Al Leonard, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, author of several articles on Teacher Centering and co-author of a nation-wide study of Centering; and Ben Henry formerly with the staff at Murdock Teacher Center, Wichita, Kansas and now at Indiana University, Bloomington. Two of the team members, Pat Geedy and Ben Henry were members of the external evaluation team during the Center's first evaluation in December, 1978 thus bringing a needed dimension of tacit knowledge and historical perspective to the evaluation effort. Dr. Leonard provided necessary and valuable observations based on experiences in evaluating other centers and provided "balance" to the teams efforts toward objectivity.

The organization of the report incorporates areas of concern as outlined by the evaluand. These areas, current practices, strengths and concerns have been examined and cited. Recommendations for the future in regard to the Policy Board, Management and Staffing, Needs Assessment Procedures, Program Evaluation Procedures, Facility, Fiscal Procedures, and Dissemination Practices are included in that order. The final section of the report is a summary of the progress made by the evaluand toward meeting the concerns stated in the first evaluation. This section also deals with the impact of the project to date.

Policy Board

Examination of the Policy Board and its functioning during this second year of operation revealed a continued practice of cooperation and congenial operation. Continued confidence in the Teacher Center Director was consistently indicated by members of this Board who have relied heavily on his recommendations for its action.

Composition of the Board was revised during the current year to include both an elementary and a secondary principal as had been recommended by the external evaluators during their 1978 observation. While both the Board and evaluators discussed the possibility and desirability to include minority representation on the Board, the Board has not been successful in achieving this goal. This is less of an issue than it may appear on the surface given the homological make up of the community. Only two percent of the enrollment are minority students and only three of the approximately 700 staff members are from minorities. The 14 member Policy Board retains a majority of teacher members as required by Federal regulations and includes representation of the required special areas such as vocational education and special education. The non-public schools are represented on the Policy Board and participate actively in programs. The Policy Board has established a written list of policies for its operation. Bounds have been set for lengths of terms in office and new appointments are staggered in time so that approximately half the Board membership will be experienced in any given year. Methods of nomination and election to the Board have been clearly established. These policies have provided a very workable blueprint for operation as evidenced by the orderly manner in which changes have been made this year.

Regular monthly meetings of the Board are held after the school day. While it would be ideal to have all members present at each meeting, this has proved to be impossible. It was suggested by the evaluators that members who

are unable to attend meetings might be allowed to send a substitute to represent their segment of the faculty or administrative staff.

Sub-committees of the Policy Board have met only occasionally and as need arose during this second year. Perhaps a greater reliance upon the various sub-committees to take on specific tasks in the identified problem areas would increase their contributions to the monthly meetings and emphasize the need for their attendance. It may be that individuals will go to meetings to get information, but they go regularly and with enthusiasm where they have jobs to do. The declining attendance at Policy Board meetings may be due to the smooth functioning of the Center or conflicting schedules.

Policy Board members expressed appreciation for the Director's practice of providing them with advance copies of the meeting agenda so that they could give consideration to issues before the meeting time. It was felt this greatly expedited meetings. The evaluators suggested a modified form of the "open agenda" meeting might be incorporated, or time for "new concerns" might be added to the agenda. This addition might stimulate input at Policy Board meetings.

Concerns were expressed by some interviewees over the lack of active involvement on the part of Policy Board members both in the meetings and with each other on a day-to-day professional or informal basis. Regular meetings once a month seems to serve the "policy" needs of the Board now that the Center is operating smoothly. If more active participation on the part of the Policy Board is desired, ways should be found to generate informal social contacts so as to build group identity through a shared history outside the board meeting room. The Policy Board may want to consider informal gatherings and problem-solving retreats to help accomplish this.

When filling vacancies on the Policy Board some consideration should be given to involving a few of the more deserving, less experienced personnel.

While it is commendable that the Policy Board is made up of experienced, dedicated personnel, the less experienced may bring a fresh outlook and new perspectives to the Policy Board. This is not to say that the evaluators found the present board to be ossified or jaded in their outlook toward education.

Management & Staffing

It has been the practice of the Columbus Teacher Center since its inception to maintain as small a staff as possible. It has been the feeling of all involved that a large staff was neither necessary to the program as designed nor amenable to continuance of the program should external funding cease. Consequently, the Columbus Teacher Center has a staff of three, Project Director, Center Director, and Secretary.

Dr. Dan C. Wertz, Assistant Superintendent in charge of secondary education in the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation is Project Director. He also serves on the Policy Board of the Teacher Center. He is considered here as part of the management of the Center by virtue of his role as Project Director. He is a staunch supporter of the Teacher Center as is the entire school administration.

The day-to-day functioning of the Columbus Teacher Center is under the management of Carl Henderson, Center Director. Mr. Henderson is responsible for carrying out the objectives of the project proposal and the policies of the Center Policy Board. These tasks include conducting needs assessments, contacting potential presenters, screening workshop applications, organizing screening committees of affected school personnel, arranging for workshop presentations, compiling feedback data on workshops completed, disseminating information about Center activities and potentials, and arranging for evaluation of Center programs and functioning, while maintaining a high level of visibility for the Center in the local community, state and region.

The Center Secretary, Asenath Coombs, assists the Director in these several tasks.

There appears to be considerable strength in the staff as it is presently constituted. It is a small, well organized staff. The nature of the program is such that a large staff is not necessary and probably would be disruptive

of the goals and objectives of the Center program. The Center Director is well qualified, enthusiastic, and enjoys the confidence of all parties to the Center Project (i.e. Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, teachers and Teachers Association, School Corporation Board Members, and Policy Board Members). The Director's particular strengths lie in his organizational and public relations skills. His ability to keep programs happening at a steady pace and his enthusiasm about and effectiveness in getting the work of the Center (particularly workshop offerings) disseminated to the teachers, the general school community, the Bartholomew County Community and the broader communities of state and national educational leaders is highly commendable. He works closely with Dr. Wertz whose talents, experience and administrative position provides the necessary linkages with school administration and brings cabinet level sanction to Center functions.

The Center secretary is also well qualified and immensely helpful to the smooth operation of Center programs. There is evidence of a strong professional working relationship between the secretary and the Director.

The evaluators are quite impressed with the number and quality of program offerings and feel the Center staff are to be commended highly for their efforts. Over 90 workshops and inservice programs have been presented in the short history of the Center. There is evidence that the Teacher Center inservice programs have heightened the district's awareness of inservice needs at all levels.

An additional strength of the management and staffing of the Center is the development of a Teachers Training Teachers Program (K-12) since the previous evaluation. This cadre of teacher trainers design their own needs assessments. Some present specialty workshops while others are available for general program presentation. All function on a strictly voluntary basis and view this activity as a professional growth and development opportunity for them-

selves as well as their audience.

Consequently, the external evaluators have virtually no concerns regarding management and staffing of the Center. Their only recommendation is for the Center Director to keep up the high quality of meaningful activity.

Needs Assessment Procedures:

The initial needs assessment conducted in 1978 laid the foundation for the development of the Teacher Center's goals and objectives. The major areas of concern identified in the first assessment have become a "three year need set" and are broad enough to provide the needed latitude in programs to allow the Center to respond to immediate needs of teachers.

Needs sensing is accomplished through the use of some quantitative instruments that are prepared for specific target groups to seek responses to suggested programs; however, informal conversations, visitations to school functions, principals meetings by the Director and Policy Board Members, and frequent telephone responses to Center communications form the basis of the Centers needs assessing. The broad categories of needs established early-on helped to identify clusters of concerns specific teachers may have. The practice has been to contact those teachers either by specialty area (C.T.C., L.D., P.E., etc.) or by department in secondary schools and establish a more specific needs statement. The Director and others seek programs to meet those specific needs. Before programs are offered the content of the proposed workshop or presentation is outlined to the potential audiences to determine whether or not that particular presentation would meet their needs and approve or disapprove of its presentation. All inservice experiences are evaluated by the recipients immediately after the experience. The results of those evaluations determine whether or not that program should be repeated for others and whether or not it was beneficial to those attending. The Center Director has indicated that a second comprehensive district-wide needs assessment is now in the planning stages and will be conducted during the 1980-81 school year. This would seem commendable as new concerns will likely be unearthed that may direct the Centers efforts in other broad areas.

Given the size of the district and the closeness of the Center Director to the activities of administrators, teachers, and community groups in both formal

and informal ways it would appear that the needs assessing procedure is working smoothly and is not over-reliant on paper and pencil data. The practice of allowing potential recipients of inservice programs to examine the content and format of the programs before being subjected to the inservice and to suggest ways that would better meet immediate concerns is a highly commendable one.

An examination of a technical report prepared by the Center staff at the end of the first year's operation and after a number of workshops had been conducted indicates high mean rating scores in "consultant background/knowledge" and "enthusiasm (scale of 1-5 both 4.78) and low in "expectation fulfillment" and "presentation utilization (M - 4.50). The small differences in response levels are probably insignificant but may suggest more careful examination of the practical applicability to teachers immediate needs. To quote an interviewee "Secondary people want programs to help low students (P.B.D., L.D., etc)." They say, "What can I do with L.D. kids in 9th grade science?" This is indicative of the need for careful screening of programs for practical utility, a function that seems to be in operation through program screening previously eluded to in this report. One building principal has "yet to hear a negative comment on programs offered."

Another commendable practice that is worthy of mention is the cadre of teacher trainers who have agreed to conduct workshops for fellow teachers and administrators in their specific area of expertise. They do continuous needs sensing in their respective buildings and provide an excellent source of grass-roots data around which programs can be designed.

The newsletters provide opportunities for teachers to respond to programs whose content have already been planned. The frequency of these responses is a further measure of teacher need.

Program Development Procedures

The needs assessment conducted within the school corporation two years ago remains one of the major guides in developing programs for teachers. Of the thirteen goals established through that process, three need areas were selected for indepth concentration during the second year; these were "Techniques for Teaching Reading", Techniques for Non-Readers in Content Areas", and "Instruction for the Gifted and Talented".

The screening device developed during the first year of Center operation has proved a useful tool for the Policy Board to consider possible inservice programs. In addition to this written appraisal, the Board and Center Director called upon the judgment of teachers to determine the appropriateness and ability of possible presenters to meet the expectations of participants in a projected program.

Teachers were invited to participate in the planning of these programs by directly voicing their concerns and expectations from Center offerings. This process of input from participants of a proposed program has led to a great degree of staisfaction of expectations from the program when it was actualized. Further concerns arising from a presentation are addressed at a follow-up review of the program. Participants interviewed registered overwhelming approval of the process and end results.

The second full year of operation of that Teacher Center has over sixty program presentations which reflect the broad areas of need expressed in the first needs assessment and teachers immediate classroom needs. Offerings have been fairly equally divided in direction for elementary and secondary personnel. Secondary involvement has been exemplary in this Center during the second year with development of programs coming through department chairpersons that reflect their department concerns and direct contact from secondary teachers. Enthusiasm of secondary administrators and teachers is reflected

in their active participation and high regard for the Teacher Center and the dispelling of an original perception by this group that Teacher Center programs were mainly for elementary people.

A program of Teachers Training Teachers has been initiated that has led to development of a local talent bank of twenty teachers who are trained to share teaching expertise with their colleagues in workshops and inservice programs. This is a commendable beginning toward the development of a larger resource of professional talent within the corporation's ranks.

Non-public schools in the area and some teachers from neighboring school districts have taken part in the programs provided through the Center. Two sessions were developed especially for administrators and their participation in this, as well as, in other Teacher Center programs indicates their acceptance of this model of in-service training and opportunity for professional gorwth. School Board members have participated in the sessions occasionally and expressed appreciation for the high caliber of programs offered.

A program offered to parents of primary students was well received and described by them as very helpful.

A suggestion was made by teachers and administrators concerned over the problem of obtaining substitute teachers that a workshop for perspective substitute teachers early in fall might provide them with helpful suggestions of what is expected from substitutes and "ideas that work" for the temporary teacher.

A procedure and policy concerning university credit for workshops and inservice experiences has been developed. Since released time for teachers and the offering of programs during the regular school day is the delivery model preferred by local teachers and administrators, the university credit feature is not a major consideration. Where such credit is given, appropriate additional work, time and expense on the part of participants is to be expected.

Program Evaluation Procedure

To date 94 workshops, conferences, and other inservice experience-based programs have been presented under the auspices of the Teacher Center. This represents an increase in target population participation from 5 percent in the first four months of operation to 66 percent to date. The Center staff continues to gather feedback data from session evaluation forms at the conclusion of each workshop and participants opinions are solicited through casual conversation and follow-up contacts by the Center Director and others. A highly commendable procedure for ensuring quality programs will be presented in the use of "need sensing" sessions in which the target group of a particular inservice program is brought together prior to the event to discuss specific topic areas, preferable format, and suitable content to meet their particular needs. A similar session has been incorporated into the program to permit the gathering of post-session data to determine the need for more such programs or the discontinuance of that segment. While this practice is time-consuming and involves the scheduling of frequent meetings with the staff it has enabled the presentation of programs that are on target, according to the teachers interviewed. It has the further advantages of bringing more teachers in contact with the functions of the Center, gives them a sense of ownership in the programs presented, and broadens the base of decision making.

As the program enters its third year the Center Director has indicated an interest in focusing the evaluation effort on identifying any changes in behavior or activity on the part of workshop participants that may have occured as a direct result of inservice training. At this time it is anticipated that measurements in student achievement gain after teacher participation in Center sponsored experiences would be one way of getting at whether or not it makes any difference if teachers participate in inservice offerings. Given the host

of variables that affect student gains in any of the various test scores, it may be difficult to show any clear relationships, and those found may be tenuous at best. The original design of the Center was to concentrate on providing opportunities for teachers to participate in self-enriching professional activities in a relaxed atmosphere. While the "Make-it-and-take-it" aspect common to many centers has intentionally been minimized except through structured experiences, the evaluators would caution against any research activity that would inject an element of competition or elitism that may be counterproductive or subversive to present egalitarian approaches to inservice education.

The Center staff has compiled a summary report of evaluations of the Center programs during the first year of operation. Evaluation data gathered from workshop participants after each program indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the programs presented so far. That process is continuing and further reports are expected soon. The proposal for continuation contains an extensive evaluation plan which the evaluators find highly commendable. Given the ambitiousness of the project the budgeted allowances for evaluation may require some revision from the current allotment in the total budget. It should be noted that there seems to be considerable latatude in the proposed budget for consultant services which may meet the anticipated evaluation expenditures.

The Center may wish to consider a meta-evaluation (an evaluation of their evaluation system) in the near future. The present team did not have sufficient time nor needed expertise to perform that service. The evaluation team would also caution against an evaluation design that was oversophisticated or that produced high quality research data, but required special interpretation to the stakeholders in the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation.

Facility

The Teacher Center continues to be housed in the Educational Services Center. This facility is centrally located and provides meeting rooms as well as work space outside of the traditional school building, offering a refreshing change of environment for participants. In addition to this facility, the Center has used meeting rooms in the nearby County Public Library, a new community facility with ample adjacent parking area. Parking continues to be a problem at the Educational Services Center. Participants expressed appreciation for the Center Director's help and suggestions in meeting their needs for nearby parking.

Teachers voiced appreciation of the location of the Center in the facility housing other curriculum resources such as the film library and saw no need to consider another location at this time.

While the Center does provide an area for teacher work, duplicating, laminating and similar activities and some "make-and-take" activities have been conducted during the past year, this function is not a major goal of this Center. The building is open for scheduled meetings sponsored by the consultant services as well as those of the Teacher Center during evening hours, during the week and advertised in Teacher Center Fliers. The Center has also conducted offerings on Saturdays. Displays and idea resource books encourage teachers visiting the Center to consider newer materials. This Center has not stressed the socializing aspect of centering; however, teachers expressed their pleasure that social and professional exchange does take place at the various programs offered.

Consideration is being given to conducting in-service activities within specific school buildings, involving only a part of the staff at a given time, with the hope that this may provide some easing of the difficulty in finding substitute teachers for released time of participants.

The facility seems to serve the project goals quite well, which are to provide a professional development program for teachers in the service area.

Fiscal Procedures:

The fiscal committee of the Policy Board continues to make budgetary policy for the Center and there is no evidence of over-control on the part of any of the participants, Policy Board or district.

There has been rigid adherence to the federal guidelines suggesting the payment of consultant honorariums at $100.00 a day. This figure is probably too low to attract presenters of the needed caliber who often turn to other institutions, businesses and industry with their services because of a higher fee structure. On the other hand the limited honorarium encourages the Center Director and the Policy Board to seek out local talent. This brings the Teacher Center closer to the resources in the local community that may be less expensive. An increase in the honorarium to $150.00 a day would likely provide the Center with a larger area of expertise from which to draw programs and services.

Given the precarious economic picture and the general nature of federal funding it is imparative that the Policy Board and the Center Director look to the other sources for a greater share of the Center's financial support. Some considerable effort is underway in regard and more is needed.

Dissemination Procedures

The Center Director has been most energetic in this regard. Mr. Henderson, Dr. Wertz and others have written articles and technical reports highlighting the Center's purpose and activities. The Center staff has participated in State Department Education Teacher Center programs, Regional Dissemination Cluster Conferences, local service and industrial groups, and hosted a Regional Orientation Conference of Teacher Centering. In addition, the Center Director has appeared as a guest on local panel and talk shows. The Center Director has presented the concept of Teacher Centering to local, state and national audiences. He attends and gives regular reports at the Corporation principals' meetings.

The Center disseminates a monthly newsletter in two editions (Elementary and Secondary) which is viewed by teachers as an important source of information. The Center keeps in contact with schools outside the corporation and has invited them to participate in Center programs at their own expense.

There is evidence of wide use of fliers and handouts (e.g. pencils, pens, and decals) to advertise the Center's existence. A slide/tape presentation has been prepared for use at meetings and in presentations to local, state, and national groups.

A particularly valuable if less conspicuous dissemination source is the many personal contacts made by the Center Director in his varied personal and professional associations. Teachers, administrators, and school corporation board members often remark at the energetic and effective public relations conducted by Mr. Henderson on a continuous basis.

Several news articles depicting Center activities have appeared in the local press and are on file in the Central Date File.

These activities will be continued in the third year with additional plans being made daily. While the external evaluators were conducting their

evaluation they were aware of new contacts being made at that time with local business and foundation leaders. In addition, the Center is planning a future regional orientation conference much like the first which will serve again to make people aware of the Columbus Teacher Center and its goals and activities.

The external evaluators feel the Center Director and staff are to be highly commended for their strong efforts and apparent high success in dissemination and public relation efforts. One recommendation by the evaluators, in addition to a resounding "Keep up the good work!" is to have a felt banner made depicting the Center logo which might be used at meetings, conferences, and workshop presentations.

Impact of Project to Date:

In contrast to the approximately 5 percent of the teachers served by the Center during the first four months of the projects operation, there is evidence of over 66 percent participation by teachers in programs to date. This figure does not include Center work with parents and community groups nor does it indicate the degree to which the Center has provided day-to-day incidental services to teachers. General responses from teachers and administrators alike have been highly enthusiastic. Specific responses run from "its meeting our specific needs" to "No question in my mind that it has made a big difference in teachers." No doubt the project has its detractors somewhere in the district, but they have not surfaced in any great number. In some cases former antagonists have been identified and urged to participate and have since become supporters of the Center. Teachers, Administrators, Policy Board members, Board of Education members, and others who were interviewed formally and informally are highly supportive.

The evaluation team found the following evidence of progress since the initial evaluation. The fact that these changes parallel the recommendations made in the first external evaluation to a great degree indicates a receptiveness and openness of the Policy Board and the Center Director to suggestions for betterment.

- o A list of procedures has been developed for Policy Board operations.
- o A formalized method of replacing Policy Board members has been established.
- o Elementary and secondary principals are now represented on the Policy Board and the Board has been expanded by two teacher positions to maintain the required balance.
- o Center workshops have been opened to preservice involvement.
- o Graduate credit policies and procedures have been worked out.

- o A cadre of teacher trainers has been identified and trained to help produce and facilitate programs.

- o Quality programs have been provided despite limited allowable honorariums.

- o Initiating workshops for substitute teachers to provide them with survival techniques and a clearer understanding of various role expectations.

- o Recording inservice experiences of the teachers/administrators as evidence of their professional growth.

Policy Board:

- o Attendance at Policy Board meetings and participation in Board activities could be enhanced by forming task groups to solve the substitute problem and by encouraging the development of a sense of "belonging" and "group identity".

- o Retreats that get people away from phones and distractions to do problem solving is a recommended vehicle for building team allegiances.

- o The Policy Board should begin developing a staff-development/in-service education program that is equitable to teachers, accountable to the Board of Education, and functional without excessive expense if federal funding is not available. The plan should be prepared prior to any federal or state mandates so as to preserve a local "fit", and local control.

- o Teachers training of teachers program is to be highly encouraged and expanded and maximum use made of those already trained so as to provide the Center with a ready cadre of trained and experienced personnel to continue existing programs and initiate new ones.

- o Teacher Center identity and location has been established and enhanced through use of logos, signs, brochures, slide-tape presentations, new releases, and bulletins of various sorts.

- o A meshing of Teacher Center functions and community facilities has helped aleviate space problems and brought about an expanded awareness of Teacher Center functions in the community.

- o Evening use of the Teacher Center has been initiated.

- o Newsletters are directed to specific target groups i.e. elementary and secondary.

- o Journal articles have been prepared and are in pre-publication state as well as technical reports containing hard data.

- o A community advisory board has been established representative of over 20 community organizations and is meeting regularly to increase awareness of Teacher Center functions.

- o A system of mini grants to sponsor local teacher research projects has been initiated and is on-going utilizing teachers in local classrooms aided and guided by area research specialists.

The following areas of concern are presented to the Policy Board for their consideration:

Substitutes: The practice of holding staff development activities during the regular school day should be encouraged and continued to the degree possible. To do this necessitates locating substitutes. The Policy Board may want to establish a special work party to try to find solutions to this problem. They would likely consider such things as:

- o Staggering the workshops and activities to keep as much of a "surge" off the system as is possible.
- o Calling the community's attention to the problem through advertising or other methods that may locate more persons willing to serve.
- o Considering alternatives to the present compensation for substitutes to bring it more in line with community pay schedules.
- o Searching for ways that teachers can substitute for others during their off periods. In elementary schools, seek similar methods that one teacher may "cover" for another in some equitable way.
- o Planning departmentalized workshops for secondary personnel and staggering presentations to make maximum use of planning time.
- o Working with building principals to plan for full-day use of substitutes in the instance of half-day Center workshops.